

MARATHI STAGE MOVEMENT

By

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THE Muslim incursions into the Deccan had begun from the early times but it was in 1347 that the Bahamani Kingdom was established at Gulberga. The capital was later on shifted to Bidar. Thereafter started the disintegration of this Muslim State into five smaller units and the major portion of the Hyderabad State came under the political influence of the Qutub Shahis at Golconda. Aurangzeb wiped out the Qutub Shahi dominance in 1687, and annexed the State to the Mughal Empire, and kept it under a Governor. Nizamul Mulk became the last Subedar of the Deccan and by the time of his death in 1748, Hyderabad became an independent State.

The composite Hyderabad State covered a large area of 82698 sq. miles in the central portion of India. By its geographical situation it has a confluence of three cultural traditions—Telugu, Maratha and Kannada. A fourth tradition of Urdu was added by the rulers.

The majority of people in Hyderabad spoke Telugu and cherished the traditions of the Andhra, Kakatiya and Vijayanagara Kingdoms, the next came the Marathas bringing with

them the cultural traditions of Paithan, Yadavas of Devagiri and the Maratha Empire at Satara and Poona. The Kannadigas who were smaller in number brought the Chalukyan, Rashtrakuta and Vijayanagar traditions. The fourth language group loosely styled Deccan, entered this area from the North.

It was in consonance with old historical traditions that the language of administration in the Hyderabad State should be the language of the rulers i.e., Urdu with a preponderance of Persian. The capital of the State was Hyderabad where Telugu, Marathi and Kannada met each other and blended harmoniously with the northern traditions brought in by the rulers. Until the second decade of the twentieth century harmony prevailed between these different language groups as sincere attempts made by them to understand each other. Later in the wake of a new political consciousness separatist tendencies were seen among the different language groups. They began to form associations for the revival of their own cultural traditions such as music, folk-songs and dances, and above all, the drama. This art is so comprehensive that it affords wide scope for the aesthetic urge of human

talents. Almost all branches of fine arts, poetry, music, dancing and painting find scope for expression in Drama, which is the subject for our investigation, and especially we will discuss here the development of Marathi stage movement in Hyderabad.

Maratha Sardars

There were four great Maratha Sardars in Hyderabad. They were: Rao Rambhas; the descendants of Vithal Sundar Pratapwant; the Rai Rayans and the Rajendras. Their mansions are situated on the southern bank of the Musi river. In fact the city itself was principally designed to the south of the river. The Marathi speaking people had their early colonization in the proximity of the palatial residences of the above four Sardars. By the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century a few people were drawn towards the North of the river, where the British Residency was located. These residents had associations with the British administered area, the Railways and the British Army. The city of Hyderabad being the capital of the State, lawyers from the Marathwada also established their households in the then called Residency area. But the indigenous roots of Marathi culture remained and can be still traced to the southern bank of the river Musi.

The Rai Rayan family has acted for generations as patrons of art and culture. The family deity of the Rai Rayans is Goddess Amba Bhavani and the family traditions obliged them to celebrate the *Navaratri* ceremony during the *Ashwin* month before the *Dasara*. Keeping nocturnal vigils was a part of the devotional ceremonies. During the ceremony the anecdotes and stories from the lives of the Goddess and her consort Lord Siva would be staged. This was called a *Lalita*. It had all the elements of dance, drama and music, and also entertaining features of humour and buffoonery. The principal role in these *Lalita* performances was that of the Goddess Amba and the handsome youth who played this part was in the regular service of the aristocratic family. The other actors, however, received an annual gratuity. But this pertains to a period earlier than 1885, a significant year in which Annasaheb Kirloskar, considered to be the father of the modern Marathi stage, died. Annasaheb was a dramatist, actor and also the proprietor of

a dramatic troupe called the Kirloskar Sangeet Natak Mandali. There are people still living who cherish the delightful reminiscences of Annasaheb's presence with the company at Hyderabad, sometime in the eighties of the last century.

Annasaheb

Annasaheb Kirloskar was a gentleman of great personality. In his time the fine arts of music, dancing and drama had fallen on evil days. Persons with questionable morale represented these arts. The decent and polished society patronised the art but considered the artists as morally degraded people. Annasaheb Kirloskar was the first man of genius who eradicated this conception from the minds of the people. Annasaheb's troupe was an ideal one. The actors were extremely religious and would never do a thing that would cast a slur on their character.

Sangli, Miraj and Kolahpur have always been noted for giving birth to actors, artists and great dramatists. Two other famous drama troupes had visited Hyderabad during these days. One of the companies was called the *Purnachandrodaya*. Krishnambhat of Sangli was its proprietor. The other troupe was the *Natyananda* Company, sponsored and managed by Keshav Rao Bavodekar. Both these companies could not command the originality of Annasaheb as they had to draw upon the mythological themes from the *Puranas*.

This was a very happy and glorious period in Hyderabad's history. Mir Mahboob Ali Khan was the lovable ruler of the State. Struggle for existence was not acute. Class consciousness and political bickerings were conspicuous by their absence. There was no dearth of commodities. Plenty and generosity were the order of the day.

Though Annasaheb Kirloskar had passed away, his drama-company continued to flourish. It visited the city for the second time in 1893 when its magic influence and overpowering fascination had reached its peak. The Company had a galaxy of stars like Bhaurao Kolhatkar, Natekar and Wagholikar, who with their graceful features, histrionic elegance and melodious music completely captivated the people of Hyderabad. The Company stayed for about ten weeks and its shows were so popular that there was always a certainty that

those who could afford would never miss the night shows and even those who were short of funds did not hesitate to pawn their valuables for the tickets. Those who could only observe and do nothing more than that, wanted to pray and encourage, those who could not act but were deeply moved by the performances desired to make monetary contributions to help in establishing a company in Hyderabad on the lines of the *Kirloskar* Company, and those who could act and sing were in search of patrons.

Temporary Theatre

In those days there was no permanent suitable theatre in Hyderabad and, therefore, a temporary theatre was set up near the building of the Central Bank. The whole area was an open *maidan* spotted with a number of tall palm trees. The audience, which came mainly from the Shah Ali Bunda and the city, managed to return in the early hours of the morning thrilled with charming music and acting. Shah Ali Banda was then an abode of great masters, experts in vocal music like Appa Tulsi and Bhatajee Babu Maharaj and veteran Tabla players, Sitar players and masters of the Harmonium. The enthusiasts organised themselves into some amateur club and staged the *Marathi* play *Shakuntala* written by Anna Saheb Kirloskar. The theatre was improvised in the Bela of Raja Chandulall. Equipment and accessories for the performance were provided freely by the rich and the poor, the orthodox and the modern.

The coaching required for this performance was received from an expert vocal musician, Baloba Natekar, an eminent actor from the *Kirloskar Natak Mandali*. Raja Laxman Raj Raj Rayan had engaged him as a musician and artist in his State. Under Baloba's guidance the music was superb. The performance of *Shakuntala* took place one Thursday night. The title role of the play was assigned to Sham Rao Nyalakal. Sham Rao was considered to be a great enthusiast of drama in Hyderabad and there are hundreds of persons still alive who can bear testimony to the zeal with which Sham Rao dedicated himself to music and drama. His debut was so successful that connoisseurs hoped to see in his performance the charms and graces of Bhau Rao Kolhatkar. Sham Rao Nyalkal's whole family consisted of artists and many of them played various roles in this performance of *Shakuntala*. They all came from respectable families.

The role of *Dushyanta* was played by Nanasaheb Kamathi, that of *Kanva* by Govindrao Agraharkar, *Sharangdhar* was portrayed by Shankar Rao Mansabdar, Kishen Rao Harakare acted as the charioteer of *Dushyanta* and the female roles of *Priyamvada* and *Goutami* were played by Sham Raojee and Govindbhat Totekar, respectively. There is no record of the rates of admission. The lovers of art were only longing to display their talents and desires were fulfilled. The artists were happy that their roles were enjoyed by many. Those who were well off had already offered their contributions and perhaps nobody who showed any interest, was denied admission.

We know of a dramatic performance which took place in Hyderabad twentyfive years ago in the *Vivek Vardhini* theatre, where the audience in all grades totalled nearly two thousand and the collection less than a hundred. It is most probable that there were a few more performances of the *Shakuntala*. Sham Rao was beaming with happiness. Hardly two years elapsed before the troupe staged *Soubhadra*, the composition of Anna Saheb Kirloskar which was one of the prize performances of his company.

Shyam Rao Nyalkala again acted as *Subhadra*, the heroine of the play; the role of *Rukmini* was assigned to Babarao Nemiwant while the roles of *Krishna*, *Arjuna* and that of *Balarama* were played by Govind Rao Agraharkar, Ambadass Rao, and Dhawalakar, respectively. Govind Rao Agraharkar, was outstanding as *Krishna* in *Soubhadra*.

Introduction of Females

Shyam Rao was a progressive artist who would always look ahead of his times. He wanted to introduce women to take female roles in drama. Many elderly persons who had an old conception of moral dignity expressed their disapproval. Shyam Rao coached students in music, vocal and instrumental. Two Telugu women, Manik Bai and Rajasbai, had come with the musical sphere of Shyam Rao. Though these women knew only Telugu, Shyam Rao took special efforts to help them memorize their roles. Later on they gave excellent musical performances. Manik Bai took the role of *Subhadra* and Rajasbai acted as *Rukmini*. It is admirable that Shyam Rao had foreseen the inevitable necessity of assigning female roles only to women. It is for

others who know better to say whether women had been introduced to take female roles earlier than 1898 in Indian dramas. As far as Marathi drama is concerned, it can be safely asserted that Shyam Rao Nyalkala was the pioneer in this field.

The talented Maratha residents of Shah Ali Banda had in the meantime discovered another field for their progressive dramatic activities. Govind Rao Agraharkar, who took the role of *Kanva* in *Shakuntala*, the roles taken by Annasaheb Kirloskar in his own company, took his cue from Annasaheb to write a drama in order to suit the available troupe of amateurs. He wrote a drama entitled *Manorama* about which nothing else is known except its name. The manuscript of the composition was not printed and the original also has gone into oblivion; but there is proof that its rehearsals had been started. Therefore, the right of being called the first Marathi dramatist in Hyderabad should go to Govind Rao Agraharkar. The curtains, the scenic arrangements and wings for the play were locally prepared by two artist-brothers named Kalojee and Nagojee Dhunde, and the make-up, painting and selection of drapery was done by a specialist named Srinivas Rao Peshkari.

Vocal Music

In the dramatic performances described so far vocal music played a very prominent part. But there were a set of amateurs who were so confident of their histrionic talents that they wanted to stage a play without songs. They elected *Zunzar Rao* by Govind Rao Deval, another great Marathi dramatist, and staged it in 1906. Gunde Rao, who was a Kannadiga; played the part of the hero *Zunzar Rao*. His personality on account of his sturdy and stout body was particularly suited for this role. His voice also was very sonorous. The role of the heroine, *Kamalaja* was very ably played by a young and handsome person Ganapat Rao Dandawate, who later on became a librarian in Baroda State. The annual celebrations of Lord *Ganesh* in the month of *Bhadrapada* gave a powerful stimulus to these musical and dramatic arts. Shyam Rao always worked for these artistic representations in the temple of *Deenanath* and trained young artists for the *Ramaleela* and for *Ganesh* celebrations. The amateur actors for the performance of *Zunzar Rao* were all those who had received training at the hands of Shyam Rao Nyalkala.

In 1907 Shyam Rao scored another triumph when he acted as *Charudatta* in *Mrichchhaka tika*. The play was staged on a site which was once a *maidan* owned by Zinda Kishtayya and is now occupied by the Zamarud Mahal Theatre. There was a huge pandal which was improvised into a theatre. Two veteran actors, one for the role of *Vasant Sena* and the other for *Shakar*, were brought from Bijapur. Ramarao Karodgiri played the role of *Vita*, Huzuri Rama Rao acted as *Cheta*, *Maitreya* was portrayed by Tokekar while Vithal Rao Nyalakala, the nephew of Sham Rao, played the role of the son of *Charudatta*. Those citizens of Hyderabad who treasure the memory of this performance speak in admiration of the role of *Charudatta* performed by Sham Rao.

Company on Business Lines

The year 1908 is noted in Hyderabad for the unprecedented havoc caused by floods in Musi River. The devastation caused by this flood was so tremendous that Hyderabad took three or four years to recover. In the year 1911, the year when the retired Raja-pramukh of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan, had ascended the throne, Shyam Rao organised a drama company on business lines. It was called the *Hyderabad Dramatic Company*. To run the Company Shyam Rao had enlisted the services of a few professional actors and himself worked as the Harmonium master and directed the acting of the dramatis personae. Lale Brothers who had distinguished themselves on the staff of the *Natya Kala Pravartak Company* and the two brothers Shanker Rao and Balwant Rao Chauhan maintained a nice standard of acting. Ishwar Rao Kohirkar seems to have extended financial aid to the Company. Shyam Rao's reputation as a talented artist could procure funds and loans from places like Sholapur Barsi and Pandharpur. The *Hyderabad Dramatic Company* visited several cities and towns in Maharashtra. Shyam Rao was able to secure large amounts, but due to bad business management the *Hyderabad Dramatic Company* went into liquidation.

Shyam Rao's devotion to dramatic art, however, could not be affected by such mishaps. In 1916 he again endeavoured to start a music club of amateurs called the *Deccan Music Club*. The aim of the club was to collect funds and assist public institutions working for social welfare and was the first institution of its kind. The report of the first year's activities

with income and expenditure is on record and shows that the club worked satisfactorily. This club tried to stage *Sharada*, one of the best plays in Marathi. It was first performed before a selected audience in the temple of *Deenanath* on Shah Ali Bunda. An elaborate public performance was staged on the 27th of April 1916 at the Krishna Theatre. The following are the names: 1. *Dattopant Godse*, Kodanda; 2. *Walujkar*, Bhadreshwar; 3. *Martand Rao*, Kanchan Bhat; 4. *Ramachandra Rao Nampalli*, Srimant; 5. *Dattopant Dhunde*, Hiranya Garbha; 6. *Vinayak Kasar*, Indira Kaku; 7. *Malhar Sasturker*, *Sharada*; 8. *Shivaram Bidarker*, Vallari.

Ramachandra Rao Kulkarni of Nampalli who took the role of *Srimant* in *Sharada* was a gifted person. He conducted a *Bhajan mandali* of music lovers for several years. He was also a great Tabla player. He had once staged the drama—*Tukaram*, and had himself played the role of *Tukaram*, the singing saint. His performance was excellent. The Nampalli Club also staged the drama *Sangeeta Vinod* on 16th November, 1916. Kashinath Waghmare's main role as *Ganu* showed a high standard of histrionic talents. Rama Rao Pradhan, a D.S.P., persuaded the Club to stage *Vinoda* once again for the War Fund. The club donated Rs. 450/- for the first World War in 1917.

Shyam Rao Epoch

For the sake of easy classification we call this epoch as the Shyam Rao Nyalkala epoch and close it in the year 1915. The activities of the Deccan Club and the work of the Club in Nampalli also chronologically belong to later period. Ramachandra Rao had caught the public attention through Nyalkal's inspiration.

The *Kirloskar Natak Mandali* visited Hyderabad for the third time in 1912. Jogalekar, Gore, Bodas were the leading actors on the staff. The torch of dramatic activity lighted in Hyderabad was still burning and Shyam Rao Nyalkal was holding it aloft.

The practice of the amateurs was to establish contacts with them and learn as much as possible from them. The secrets of histrionic art, the efforts to improve the voice, the arrangement of scenes and curtains, and every other detail that helped to make the performance a success were learnt by them. Later dramatic activities were not confined to Shah

Ali Banda and, therefore, herethe epoch of Shyam Rao Nyalkal can be aptly concluded.

1915—1934

The intense urge for dramatic and artistic activities generated by the first visit of the Kirloskar Dramatic troupe under the personal guidance of Annasaheb Kirloskar before 1885 kept alive the love of dramatic art. Almost all the first-rate drama troupes visited Hyderabad city which invariably extended a warm welcome to them. Hyderabad was never reckoned as a big city in Maharashtra at any time. But the elite of Marathwada resided in the Capital. The *Jagirdars*, *Mansabdars*, the *Rususumdars*, the *Yomiyadars*, and other rich sections of the Maratha community permanently resided in Hyderabad. The city had served as a venue for the All Maharashtra Literary Conference twice, once in 1931, when Doctor S. V. Ketkar was the President, and again in 1945, when Professor N.R. Phatak was the President. Therefore, it is obvious that the place of Hyderabad in the cultural activities of Maharashtra has always been significant. Not only the top class dramatic companies like the *Kirloskar*, the *Gandharva*, the *Balwant*, the *Yeshawant* and the *Shivraj* but also many second rate and mediocre companies like the *Swadesh Hitachintak*, the *Tiwarekar Sangeeta Mandali*, the *Arya Subodha*, the *Nutan*, the *Sulochana*, the *Manohar*, the *Maharashtra*, the *Shahu Nagarwasi* etc., visited the city and the uniform impression on all was that the city had a large number of connoisseurs of dramatic art whose patronage was generous. If we compute in a general way, with moderation we can say that the fifteen to twenty dramatic troupes which visited Hyderabad must have collected about four to five lacs of rupees from the city during this period. Such a liberal contribution from Hyderabad is a clear indication of the genuine love and devotion in the hearts of Hyderabad Marathas for dramatic art.

Local Associations

The city itself had a number of great artists and also patrons for them. The constant visits of dramatic troupes inspired the local talent and furnished the necessary impetus for dramatic activities. The local citizens were able to learn several new features from the rich experience of these companies. Mere intense attachment to these arts and a study of literature on art would not have been sufficient to show fruitful results, had not the dramatic troupes given them practical demonstrations in

the form of dramas. Attempts were being made to form amateur dramatic associations to fulfil the urge for staging dramas. For, associations, societies and institutions are essential for the proper development of cultural activities. These associations celebrated the anniversaries of great dramatists and discussed the science of dramaturgy from an academic point of view. They organised demonstrations of vocal music and outstanding scenes from the plays. Such features invariably lend charm and variety to the function and produce a deeper impression on the minds of the people. During the season when dramatic companies gave their performance the local associations established contact with the artists and invite them to their associations. The presence of these artists in such social functions enthused the local youngsters considerably. Ordinary demonstrations of vocal music and histrionic talents by young enthusiasts elicited healthy criticisms from these masters. I remember of such a golden opportunity of seeing the leading actors from the *Gandharva Natak Mandali*, being warmly received and honoured by the Marathi students of the Hindu Hostel of the Osmania University, located on Chiragh Ali Lane, in 1926. In the performance Narayan Rao Rajahansa *alias* Balagandharva, the uncrowned king of the Maharashtrian stage was the focus of everybody's attention. There was a charming actor and singer, Master Vishnu who had given the vocal demonstration of the famous song '*Chandrika hi Janu*' from the *Manapman* and Gandharva and Patwardhanbuva were nodding in joyous response. This incident deserved a special mention because on no other occasion, I think, a whole troupe was welcomed in such a manner. The sincerity and affection of the students overcame all impediments in organising such functions. When great actors like Dinanath Mohite, Lele, Behre, Jogalekar, Bhadkamkar, Kolhatkar etc., visited the city, they were warmly welcomed and honoured. They in return shared their knowledge and experience with these local enthusiasts.

Thus influenced and inspired by great artists talented youth of Hyderabad organised several amateur dramatic associations. The *Amateurs' Club* was started in 1915. The *Dakshina Shahitya Sanvardhak Natya Samaj* in 1924, the *Abhinaya Bharat Mandal* in 1926, the *Natavardhak Lalita Seva Sangh* in 1931. The *Khadasthak Mandal* in 1932. The *Music Circle* in 1933, the *Maharashtra Natya Villas Mandal* in 1934.

During this period the artists of Shah Ali Banda produced a drama in Urdu called *Taj-e-Wafa*. The *Kirloskar Dramatic Troupe* which had so far catered to the tastes of the *Marathi* knowing people and had collected large sums had extended its activities to the Urdu knowing citizens of Hyderabad also through its histrionic talents. The *Taj-e-Wafa* proved a grand success and helped drama-roupes to realize their dreams.

The Hyderabad Amateurs' Dramatic Club

It has been already said that Shah Ali Banda, in the old city, was the oldest colony of the Maharashtrians. Shyam Rao Nyalkar was the greatest and sincerest devotee of arts of music and drama. But as the population began to move towards the north of the river music and activities regarding drama began spreading in the localities called the Residency, Gowliguda and Nampalli. Thus in 1915 the *Hyderabad Amateurs' Dramatic Club* was formed in the Residency locality, under the presidency of Dharmavira Vaman Rao Naik. The main burden of all cultural activities fell generally on this leader. It was, therefore, quite natural that he should be the leader of the drama activities. The treasurer was Narsopant Boramanikar, a rich merchant and a man of culture. He offered the big hall on the first floor of his shop for the drama-rehearsals of the club.

The first play selected for performance was the '*Totyache Band*'. This was a historical play written by the eminent author N. C. Kelkar. The actors included handsome and youthful persons like Vyankat Rao Phadke, Dattopant Lele, Dattopant Godse and Ranganath Rao Prabhune. Plays were rehearsed in the presence of an advisory board consisting of the Gadgil brothers, Waman Rao and Madhav Rao, Laxman Rao Phatak and Doctor Shouche. The Troupe of the *Gandharva Natak Mandali* was already in town and giving its performances. The members of the club benefited from these performances. They got help and guidance from the great humorous actor Ganapat Rao Bodas and Sadashiv Ranade, a female role expert, of the *Gandharva* group. The well known actor Devadhar displayed excellence in the make up of *Nana Phadins* and by modelling it on the old and genuine picture. Dattopant Lele appeared more real to the spectators than the Nana himself. The curtains and scenes and drapery were all borrowed from the Company and there was nothing left wanting. Venkat Rao Phadke

had played the role of the hero. The role of *Amala* was portrayed by Modak and he looked so comely that Justice Keshav Rao Koratkar, another pillar of the Maharashtra Society at Hyderabad, made intimate enquiries about the youngman and Dharmavir Naik, who was by his side, jokingly asked Dattopant Lele to take care of his maids and other attendants for concern was being shown about them even by saintly men like Keshav Rao. The second performance of the same play was staged when the dramatic Company of Ganapat Rao Joshi was in Hyderabad.

There was no equipment available for this second performance as it was available on the first occasion, and yet even this show was good.

Second Drama

The second drama selected by this club was the humorous *Vichitra Leela* by S. P. Joshi. By the time this play was taken up in 1919 new artist members had joined the Club. They were Hanamanth Rao Prabhune, Govind Rao Dikshit, Dattopant Chikshe and Doctor Vatave. *Vichitra Leela* also was staged twice. This play brought into the limelight two new good actors, Prabhune and Dikshit. The total income from this play came to twelve hundred rupees. It was utilized for purchasing costly books on Medicine and Engineering and they were loaned to poor students in these faculties. Many poor and deserving students took advantage of these books and became doctors and engineers and remembered the Club with gratitude.

The *H.A.D. Club* chose "*Hach Mulacha Ba*" the famous play of Mama Warerkar and its rehearsals were begun with some new members like Govind Rao Kayamkhane, Kalyan Rao and Dr. Joshi. Though all arrangements were made and satisfaction in rehearsals reached, transfers of some artists who were Government servants took place and the drama could not be staged.

The history of this club is very encouraging. It clearly establishes the fact that when cultured and responsible persons handle an affair all the evils that are associated with the pursuit of such arts are eliminated and it produces healthy results. Even the funds were utilized for the noblest of purposes, of free supply of costly books to poor students. This was an ideal way of extending help to needy and the

pupils thus benefited became good citizens. The students who look advantage of this scheme were expected to be helpful to others in times of need.

The Dakshina Sahitya Sanvardhak Natya Samaj

An institution called the *Dakshina Sahitya Sangh* was actively working in Gowliguda. It organised public meetings and debates, conducted a free reading room and library. These were mainly literary activities. The attention was directed towards creating an awakening in the classes and not the masses. The *Sangh* was always in need of money for the purchase of books and magazines. Therefore, the *Sangh*, with the double purpose of earning funds and also offering an intellectual recreation to the public developed a dramatic wing called the *D.S.S.N. Samaj* in 1924.

The *D.S. Sangha* celebrated its annual day with great eclat. They also held public meetings on the *Gadakari Day*. Rama Ganesh Gadakari is the leading dramatist, eminent poet and an outstanding humorist in Marathi. While delivering disquisitions and lectures on the various facets of his sparkling personality, the enthusiastic members of the *Sangh* gave histrionic demonstrations of scenes from his dramas. And with the encouragement of some of the members like Bhaskar Rao Paradkar, Narayan Rao Nandapurkar, Ganapat Rao Golegamkar, the President of the *Sangha*, Vasudeo Rao Hardikar and Digambar Rao Bindhu, the *Ekacha Pyala*, one of the most powerful dramas of Gadakari, was taken up. Govind Rao Dikshit was a talented member, and had already stood out as a promising actor in the '*Vichitra Leela*'. The *D. S. Sangha* was at that time holding discussions about the evil effects of drink and the comparative merits of three plays on this subject of prohibition.

The play was put on boards on the 18th of September 1924. The *Ekacha Pyala* is a powerful drama. The literary style of dialogues is practically unsurpassed by any other dramatist, the range of emotions is very wide and the sweep of intellectual height is quite remarkable. Only actors of high calibre could successfully stage this drama.

The roles of *Sudhakar*, *Ramalall* and *Gita* were taken by Govind Rao Dikshit, Dusange and Loya respectively. The performance was a grand

success and on the request of Dharmavira Vaman Naik the *Ekacha Pyala* was staged a second time on the 24th of September 1924 in the Vivek Vardhini Theatre.

This *Sangha* enthused by the success of the *Ekacha Pyala* experimented with another play the *Satteche Gulam* by Mama Varerkar. A special screen was painted for this drama by P. S. Kale, a Hyderabad artist who was employed later in the *Lalit Kaladarsha Natak Mandali*. The roles of *Vaikuntha* and *Kshama* were represented by Dikshit and Loya respectively who acquitted themselves very well.

Roles in the Ekacha Pyala

1. *Ramalall* : Dusange. 2. *Bhagirath* : Aragade. 3. *Sudhakar* : Dikshit. 4. *Taliram* : Bhagawan. 5. *Sarad* : S. Ratanalikal. 6. *Gita* : Loya. 7. *Sindhu* : M. Humnabadkar.

Roles in the Satteche Gulam

1. *Nalini* : Phatak. 2. *Vaikuntha* : Dikshit. 3. *Ramabai* : S. Ratnalikal. 4. *Kshama* : Loya. 5. *Master* : Bhoomkar. 6. *Martand Rao* : Y. D. Joshi. 7. *Heramb* : Moru Desai.

Bhoomkar and Y. D. Joshi played the roles of *Master* and *Martand Rao* respectively. These two actors reached a very high standard in their humorous roles. Shetha Lakshmi Niwas Ganeriwal, a local commercial magnate who witnessed the play was so much pleased with Loya's role as *Kshama* that he donated hundred and one rupees on the spot. This play was acted twice, first being on 9th October, 1925. The income of the performance staged on the 16th October, 1925 was contributed to the Anath Vidyarthi Griha.

The club continued its activities and staged *Punya Prabhav* another great play of Gadakari.

Roles in Punya Prabhav

1. *Vasundhara* : Prabhune; 2. *Kalindi* : R. Baji; 3. *Bhupal* : Dikshit; 4. *Vrindavan* : M. Desai; 5. *Nupur* : Y. D. Joshi; 6. *Kankan* : Bhumkar.

Many of the active members of the *Sangha* were students and Government servants who drifted to various other places and hence the *Sangha* ceased to exist. But all good actors who were permanently residing in Hyderabad

reappeared on the stage through other Associations.

Abhinava Bharat Mandal

This amateur dramatic association was formed in June 1926. Hanamanth Rao Prabhune, an experienced actor was its Secretary and Vishwanath Naik was its treasurer. The other members were Gopal Rao Phanasalkar, Dr. Moropant Desai, Dr. Digamber Rao Anangapadkar and Dr. Jepal.

In one year this *mandal* was able to stage Gadakari's *Bhavabandhan*. The net income of this play was donated to the Balika Ganesh Mandal. There was another performance of the same play.

This *mandal* took up a historical play *Kanchan Gadchee Mohana* by S.K. Khadilkar and staged it on the 15th of June, 1928. This was a charitable performance in aid of the Bharat Swayam Sevaka Dala. By this time Hanamanth Rao Prabhune had resigned and severed his connection with the Mandal on account of certain individual differences.

The Natvardhak Sangh

Shah Ali Bunda, the birth place of Marathi dramatic activities had consistently contributed to the advancement of fine arts. When the *Sangha* was constituted in 1931 it chose the play *Rajakunvar* for staging. This was a historical drama. Its first performance was staged on the 15th of February, 1931. It was liked by the spectators. A second performance was immediately taken up for the aid of the students' Free Home. This was arranged by Shri Ekamandikar and others.

The *Sangha* gathered an enthusiastic group of members. Kishan Rao Nizamabadkar and Sri Talapallikar were the joint secretaries. The *Sangha* launched on a new venture of staging a drama in Hindi with songs in between. The title of the play was *Deshadasha*. Rangarao Kadyal took the principal role while Devidas Rao Apte, Vinayak Rao Limaya and Chandrapuri participated in the play in a very successful manner. Narayan Rao Vyasa of Hussaini Alam was the composer of songs. The music direction was by Dole and the Tabla and Harmonium accompaniment was done by Ranganathbuva and Amba Prasad respectively. Nawab Salar Jung was kind enough to preside

over the first performance. He donated fifty rupees in appreciation to the *Sangha*. The *Sangha* later took up the Hindi version of the *Ekacha Pyala*. The enthusiastic and energetic member G. R. Ekamamdikar passed away in 1934 and the activities of the club could not be revived.

The Lalita Seva Sangha

This is another dramatic Association which was founded by some members on the Shah Ali Banda. This *Sangha* had a zeal for dramas. They performed playlets and one-act plays like the *Paritoshak*, the *Shialele Shahane* the *Kaviraj Shahane*, the *Amrit* and the *Sasvancha Chhala*. This *Sangha* enlisted teenaged boys and worked as the *Bala Company* and celebrated the *Ganeshotsava* on a very magnificent scale. The musical *mela* performance of this Association was generally of a very high class. The same *Sangha* staged some plays in 1943. Of that we shall speak later when we come to that period.

The Gajanan Club, Nampalli

Namapalli locality, just in the vicinity of the Broad Gauge Hyderabad Railway Station, was also a thickly populated locality in Hyderabad. During the days when Hyderabad had only one Railway station for both the meter and broad gauge lines, a newcomer would have the greatest fascination for this locality nearest to the station. Persons connected with the Railway, i.e., the actual railway servants at Hyderabad and Secunderabad, the community of Hammals and later a band of settlement employees in the Revenue Department, chose to live in this locality. Among them, there was a gentleman by name Ramachandra Hanumanth Kulkarni—a settlement employee who deserves special mention for his activities towards music and drama. He had all the qualities of heart and head needed for an outstanding person. He was a good Tabla player and a singer of *Bhajans*. Shyam Rao Nyalakal's *Deccan Music Club* had selected Ramachandra Rao for the role of *Srimont* in *Sharada* in 1916, and Ramachandra Rao who had a flare for acting remained a devotee.

The *Gajanan Club* was founded on the auspicious day of *Dashera* in 1915. The aim of the Club was to strengthen and extend the construction of the Shivamandir situated in Devibagh at Nampalli. To begin with the

membership was 34 and Ramachandra Rao was the Joint Secretary. The Club selected *Santa Tukaram* for staging. This Club had always a double purpose of doing something for art and also religion. *Tukaram* was staged five times during two years.

Ramachandra Rao took the main role of *Tukaram* and fascinated the spectators with his acting and also the singing of *Abhangs*. The other actors also showed a high standard of dramatic acting because the direction was good and the rehearsals were numerous.

There were five performances of the *Tukaram* :

First performance	on the 3rd of August 1916;
Second	„ „ „ 19th „ August 1916;
Third	„ „ „ 25th „ August 1916;
Fourth	„ „ „ 14th „ Sept. 1916;
Fifth	„ „ „ 24th „ May 1917.

The *Gajanan Club* was able to collect a good sum through this play. They made contributions to the V. V. Education Institute, the Renapur Sansthan and the Shiva Temple in Nampalli. The last performance was a charity show for the Lady Fraser War Fund. A handsome donation was presented to the wife of the British Resident. The following is the letter of thanks received from the authorities of the Fund. We quote it in parts. It is dated the 5th of June, 1917.

“In the name of my committee I beg to sincerely thank you and the members of the *Shree Gajanan Club* for their most generous gift which we gratefully accept. The amount will be devoted in some form to the aid of the sick and wounded and will be much appreciated.” The letter is signed by Mrs. Constance Fraser, President, Ladies' War Relief Association.

This last performance was witnessed among others by Smt. Sarojini Naidu, who ascended the stage and made a brilliant speech congratulating the actors upon their excellent roles. She also presented a silk brocade '*Sela*' to the chief actor Ramachandra Rao Kulkarni for his role as *Tukaram*, the immortal saint of Maharashtra. This was sent by Sir Kishan Prasad, through his son with a request that Sarojini Devi should present it.

The report of this Club on the performances of *Tukaram* is written in a masterly

manner by Ramachandra Rao Kulkarni in Modi Script. He had apologized for not being much educated to write the report so he gave it in his own untutored way.

The Khadashtak Mandal

This *Mandal* was constituted in 1932 and was run by well educated members, a majority of whom consisted of graduates. The aim of the *Mandal* was to revive appreciation for drama which had received a tremendous set back on account of the talkies and also to finance the activities of educational institutions like libraries, schools and the activities for creating an awakening among the ladies. The name of the Club is rather peculiar. The *Khadashtak* is an astrological setting of stars between the husband and wife, which is meticulously avoided before a marriage is arranged. But the world knows that whatever may be the agreement and disagreement between the stellar constellation married life alternates with sharp differences and intimate harmonies. There have been several institutions with melodious names connoting sweet friendship and amiability but even they founder on the rocks of misunderstanding and difference. Therefore, the members thought it wise to give a title which would justify its disintegration if it came at any time. The first drama chosen by the *Mandal* was also the *Khadashtak*. This is one of the best dramas in Marathi on realism in life.

Except for Y. D. Joshi and Raghavendra Rao Gangavati of the *Kannad Dramatic Club*, the other actors were newly introduced to the stage. The direction and the rehearsals were thorough. The performances came off in 1932 in the V. V. Theatre; the income of the first show was donated to the Bala Vidyarthi Ganesh Mandal and the second show was staged for the requirements of the *Mandal*. The *Khadashtak* brought to public notice the histrionic talents of V. K. Bhawe, R. M. Joshi, S. R. Kurwalkar, R. G. Deshpande and Shivanarayan.

The *Mandal's* second choice was *Varta Vihar* by Professor K. G. Pundit. This drama has a theme similar to the *School for Scandal*. Its first performance was on the 25th of April, 1933 and the second in the month of May. The first was in aid of the Keshav Memorial fund of the V. V. Old Boys' Association and the second in aid of the Marathi School at Secunderabad.

The role of the heroine assigned to Vasudo Rao Valsangkar achieved a high standard of excellence. Valsangkar was a handsome and youthful person then and his features displayed their potential enticing charms in the female role. Kurwalkar's role as *Sundarakaku* was also very effective. The whole group of actors acquitted themselves very well.

This *Mandal* chose another play for their rehearsals. It was the *Sashtang Namaskar* by Pralhad Keshav Atre, one of the greatest humorists in the Maharashtra dramaturgy. This was his first venture and had attained a grand success in Bombay and Poona. The demonstrations by the *Khadashtak Mandal* of the *Sashtang Namaskar* also won great admiration from the audience in Hyderabad. The first show came off on the 5th of March, 1934 and the second on the 28th of July, 1934. The first show was in aid of the Balwant Vachanalaya at Aurangabad for which Anand Rao Waghmare was collecting funds in Hyderabad. The second was performed in aid of the Hind Mahila Samaj, led by Sushilabai Phatak. Dharma Veera Vaman Naik presided over the function and expressed his deep appreciation of the performances of Y. D. Joshi, V. K. Bhawe and R. M. Joshi who had played the roles of *Bhadrayu*, *Siddheshwar* and *Rao Bahadur*.

The *Khadashtak Mandal's* next choice was the *Ghara Baher*, another play of P. K. Atre. This play was of a serious type with sparkling humour. This performance was made in aid of the library at Latur. Dr. Nilakantha Rao Kulkarni was the enthusiastic secretary working for it at Hyderabad. This *Mandal* always kept the spectators well posted with the theme of the play by distributing printed summary of the plays they performed. The spectators always knew what to expect of the stage from the very beginning. V. K. Bhawe, R. M. Joshi and Shankar Rao Sadawarte were the President, Vice-President and Secretary respectively of the *Mandal*. The *Mandal* broke up not on account of any misunderstanding between the members but due to the transfer of Government servants who took active part in the *Mandal*.

The Sneha Sanvardhak Mandal

This *Mandal* was formed for producing some drama on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Vivek Vardhini Institution. The performance was

intended to secure some donation for the celebration. Kashinath Rao Vaidya, the Secretary of the Institute and V. V. Hardikar, the Head Master, took the initiative. They decided that the participants in the drama should be only the staff and students of the Vivek Vardhini Institute.

This *Mandal* staged a play, *Lakshmi Sadhana*, specially written for the occasion by G. V. Bhide, a well known English teacher on the staff. It was a good social play ending in a happy union of the hero and the heroine.

The actors were well chosen and their acting too reached a high standard of artistic achievement. Govindrao Dikshit, Yeshavant Rao Joshi, Madhav Rao Bhoomkar and Shankar Rao Sadawarte were good actors, it was acknowledged by all. Bindu Pagdi and Pandurang Kale in their female roles and Keshav Rao Kulkarni in the male role displayed great talent. Some students like Mande, Killedar and Kulkarni performed their parts with understanding and skill. It was the desire of all that V. V. Hardikar, the Head Master, should be brought on the stage in some role or other. He was persuaded to take the role of a doctor who was invited to examine a patient in *Laxmi Sadhana*. V. V. Hardikar acquitted himself creditably.

Laxmi Sadhana could procure funds for the Silver Jubilee to the tune of four hundred rupees. The author of the play, Gangadhar Bhide, was honoured for writing the beautiful play for the occasion. This was the unique feature of this *Mandal* and deserves a special mention.

The Maharashtra Samaj, Secunderabad

Secunderabad has a large number of *Marathi* speaking people. A majority of middle class people stay in Sitaphalmandi. They were obliged to start a Marathi Primary School called the Nutan Marathi Vidyalaya. The income of fees from the pupils could not cover the whole expenditure involved in running the school. They thought of staging a drama.

Enthusiasts like Dr. Phatak, A. P. Joshi, Govind Rao Gadre, Rajabhau Zambre, Ganapat Rao Marathe and N. P. Paithankar united together to stage *Sangeeta Vara Pahije* which came off on the 6th September, 1934 in V. V. Theatre at Hyderabad. This gave a

return of six hundred rupees which strengthened the position of the School.

This dramatic group of Secunderabad staged play after play and helped the cause of the Primary School. This *Samaj* selected the *Bhramacha Bhopla* of P. K. Atre. It was put on boards on the 10th October, 1936 at Hyderabad in V. V. Theatre. They say the parts played by the Lele brothers equalled the norms set by the actors in the Balamohan Dramatic Company for whom the play was written by Atre.

The *Samaj* staged *Langnachi Bedi* by the same author. This was performed in the Rama Gopal Theatre for the celebrations of the Ganesh Utsava Jubilee on the 12th September, 1938.

The *Samaj* realized that method of staging dramas was very suitable inasmuch as it afforded a field for dramatic display and secured funds for a noble cause. The *Usna Navra* by Tamhankar was the next play selected. The *Samaj* had realised that a humorous comedy was easier to perform than a serious play. This was staged on the 7th of January, 1940 at Secunderabad in Remy Theatre.

The glamour of the drama *Khadasthak* was so great that even this *Samaj* began to rehearse it. The first performance was staged at Jalna in the theatre of the Secunder Talkies in aid of the War Fund and also of the Primary School. The performance came off on the 23rd of December, 1941. The War Fund and the School received three hundred rupees each. The *Samaj* displayed its adventurous spirit by proceeding to a distant place, and the second performance of the play was held at Hyderabad. On the 7th of January, 1942, the play was staged at Sagar Talkies in Hyderabad. Sri D. S. Dalvi had taken the role of *Kavishwar*. After the success at Jalna, the actors rose to greater heights in representing their roles.

The actors of this *Samaj* rushed to Jalna once again and staged the *Lagnachi Bedi* with a little change in the personnel in Ghaib Theatre on 23rd April, 1943. A part of the income was donated to the War Fund. This *Samaj* had always to bank upon the slender resources of the Marathi knowing people, though large-hearted non-Marathi also purchased tickets and witnessed the show.

The *Samaj* selected *Sangeeta Parivartan* in Hindi for performance and staged three shows, the first on 9 December, 1943 at Rajamahall Talkies, Secunderabad, the second and the third on the 8th and 9th January, 1944, respectively, at the King's Girls' High School in Secunderabad.

The Apte brothers of Hyderabad gave solid help to the *Samaj* and that was why the vocal music of the actors brought applause from the spectators.

The report of the *Samaj* states that they collected about ten thousand rupees and donated four thousand three hundred and fifty rupees for charitable purposes. The *Samaj* was given special facilities by the N. S. Railways on its two visits to Jalna because of its contributions to the War Fund. The names of the actors are not known in detail. The nameless devotees of Art deserve our admiration and gratitude.

We cannot adequately conclude this chapter without summing up the histrionic activi-

ties discussed here. About ten dramatic associations were formed on different occasions by different persons with one and the same object in view. These associations performed about thirty-five plays and collected about 15,000 rupees and donated a considerable portion of it for universally acknowledged noble purposes. These amateur bodies served the dramatic art and introduced new persons who displayed great histrionic talents. Govind Rao Dikshit, V. K. Bhawe, Madhav Rao Bhoomkar, Y. D. Joshi, Dattopant Lele, Hanmanth Rao Prabhune and others were brought into the forefront. The apprehension that film may entirely appropriate the field of acting and oust the dramatic art from its pre-eminent place was removed from the minds of the people. Hyderabad strengthened dramatic activities and assured that the fields for dramas and the films are clearly separated, though the principles of aesthetics underlying both are allied. We have named this period of activity, based on imitation as *Anukaranakal*. The histrionic services rendered by the inhabitants of Hyderabad were original and self-inspired.